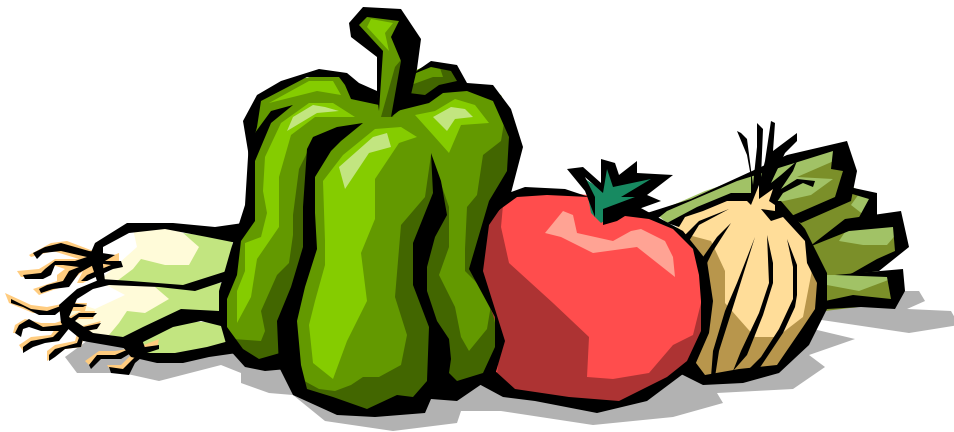


Interim Report
of the
Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and
Food Security



submitted to the 120th Maine Legislature
January, 2001

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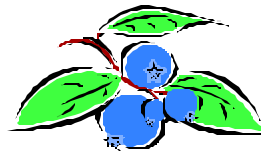
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Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger & Food Security

January 9, 2001

The Honorable Michael Michaud
Senate President
Maine Senate
SHS # 3
Augusta, Maine 04333

The Honorable Michael V. Saxl
Speaker of the House
Maine House of Representatives
SHS #2
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear President Michaud and Speaker Saxl:

The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security herein submits an interim report to the 120th Maine Legislature concerning its findings and recommendations to date. The Commission is charged by the Legislature to finish its work by the end of 2001.

At this time there are many proposals under consideration by the Commission. However, several proposals offer clear, straightforward and timely actions that will produce valuable results for those who are hungry or at risk of hunger in Maine. This interim report presents those recommendations at this time and urges swift action to implement them.

The commission has focused, as is required by Resolve, upon those actions that will lead to ending hunger and achieve food security in Maine, not merely alleviating hunger by providing services that fill gaps. As such, much attention has been given to the circumstances and conditions that keep people from being food secure.

However, members are also aware that there is no simple solution and that hunger will not be ended overnight. Emergency aid services are essential and will no doubt be needed for many years to come to deal with emergency situations. Therefore, the recommendations proposed herein include both fundamental and structural changes as well as ways of improving services that are intended to alleviate temporary conditions.

Sincerely,

Paul C. Christian,
Chair



Summary of Interim Recommendations

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| I. <u>The State of Maine should work toward achieving a livable wage for all of its citizens.</u> | II. |
| <u>Maine must ensure the services necessary for families to successfully compete in the workplace.</u> | III. |
| <u>Maine must have a comprehensive food policy and structure that ensures Maine consumers, especially lower income consumers, to have access to affordable food from Maine farms.</u> | IV. |
| <u>Maine should make school lunch and breakfast universal programs for all Maine children</u> | |

In its work to date, the Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has identified four broad goals listed above toward which the State of Maine needs to work in order to ensure that food security becomes a reality for all Maine citizens. The Commission has identified eleven "first steps" of a legislative nature that will help to move the State toward achieving these goals.

- 1. Expand the Maine Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).**
Make the existing credit program refundable (similar to the federal EITC) and increase the amount of refund a family can receive from 5% (currently) of the federal rate to 15% in 2002 and to 25% in 2003.
- 2. Increase the minimum wage.**
Raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 per hour starting immediately.
- 3. Allocate funds for a Vehicle Loan Pilot Program for low income families in need of dependable transportation.**
- 4. Revisit Maine's Food Policy**
Because of the importance of a strong bond between Maine's food production capacity and the level of food security and quality of nutrition of its citizens, the Commission encourages quick action by the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and offers support, assistance and input of members and staff to update Maine's Food Policy. The Commission is especially concerned that Maine's Food Policy include a food security component and contain guidance and mechanisms for implementation and periodic measurement of results.

5. Create a Demonstration fund to develop creative solutions to barriers to obtaining fresh locally grown food.

Create a one-year demonstration fund that can be used by agencies to act as a catalyst to develop systems for linking lower income clients and local farmers that will overcome transportation problems and other difficulties lower income individuals have in gaining access to affordable and healthy local food and will reestablish direct purchasing links between consumers and Maine farms.

6. Establish a Maine Agricultural Consumer Promotion Coupon Program targeted to low income citizens.

Follow through on the massive media campaign conducted by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Resources to promote consumption of locally produced food by providing coupons as an incentive to establish the initial purchase for consumers with limited income in order to reintroduce Maine consumers to purchasing food directly from Maine growers.

7. Increase the amount of reimbursement to schools offering school nutrition programs and require schools to use the additional funds to address the problems that have been identified that reduce participation.

Change the basis for the current state subsidy from 3 cents per meal to 3 cents per pupil for school lunch. Add 1 1/2 cents per pupil dedicated to improving breakfast programs. Funds must be used by schools to overcome the obstacles that seem to be so universal within the program and to increase participation (improve menu offerings, reduce stigma, develop creative ways to get breakfast into the morning curriculum, etc.)

8. Increase the number of School Breakfast Programs

Help more schools to establish breakfast programs by easing the eligibility requirements for the school breakfast incentive grant program created by the 119th Maine legislature from 30% to 20% of their students eligible for free or reduced price meals.

9. Increase Department of Education efforts to assist schools to reduce stigma and increase participation in School Meals Programs

Instruct the Department of Education to examine how school nutrition programs are being delivered across the state, identify systems that are working to ensure anonymity and that result in high participation rates and assist other schools to adopt measures that work.

10. Expand Nutrition Education programs to provide more components that focus on locally produced foods.

11. Create a Seamless System of Services for those in Need

Finally, because the Commission has also found that a confusing, and sometimes conflicting myriad of programs, policies and guidelines exist to fill the gap for people in immediate need of assistance, and because ending hunger requires significant changes that will

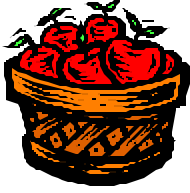
not be accomplished quickly or easily, we also recommend the State move toward a more seamless system where no person falls through the cracks.

Interim Report of the
Maine Millennium Commission
on Hunger and Food Security



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I. Introduction

Hunger is more than a problem of lack of food. The United States produces enough food to feed millions beyond its own borders. In Maine, 7000 farm produce over \$500 million worth of farm products each year. We have the most efficient, most advanced, and most productive food production system in the world. Yet hunger persists in a nation as wealthy as ours and in the State of Maine. One in ten citizens are either hungry or at risk of hunger, according to the USDA. Though hunger in its severest forms is rarely seen in Maine, the lack of food security, the number of people living with inadequate amounts of nutritious food, and temporary periods of hunger are far too frequent.

Hunger is largely an outcome of structural barriers, inequities, and fundamental changes in our economy, our food distribution system, and our society that have left many not sharing in the wealth and bounty of our nation and many of Maine's farmers on the sidelines in the food delivery system.

Most importantly, this Commission wants you to know that hunger is not an act of God or an act of nature. It is a choice we are making. It may not be a conscious choice or a voluntary choice, but right now, through our public policies and our actions as a society, we are choosing hunger. We can deny hunger, we can keep it hidden, we can look the other way, but nevertheless, hunger is a persistent and pernicious fact that is eroding the very fiber and fabric of life in Maine for all its' citizens.

A Prescription for Ending Hunger as a Public Policy



We are persuaded by the testimony we have heard, the data we have collected and reviewed, and the perspectives of the many authorities engaged in this area which have been shared with us, that there are three major overarching areas impacting on hunger and food security. They are: Economic Security and Well-being; A Food Policy, or in this case, the lack thereof and the appropriate structures to ensure its success, and; Infrastructure, including that of Education, Transportation, Communication, and Nutrition Services for children and special needs populations. These areas of concern are far beyond the ability of individuals to remedy or effectively address. Moreover, the scope and nature of these issues effectively precludes any micro-approach, such as through the instrumentality of a municipality, a county, or some amalgamation of several entities or political jurisdictions. Rather, we are convinced that the totality of these matters, to greater or lesser degree, impacts on the entire State. The public policies pursued by the State of Maine have the potential to positively impact on these three fronts.

We have also been made acutely aware of how public policies and programs, or the lack thereof effect people's lives and effect food security. The issue for example, of older Maine citizens having to make choices between purchasing the prescription medications they may require to maintain

health and skimping on sufficient nutrition or going without some meals altogether, is one which can only be addressed through State or federal policy. Additionally, assuring that Maine citizens have access to affordable transportation, opens new opportunities to those who find a disproportionate portion of their income going toward maintaining a barely operable, expensive to run, potentially unsafe older vehicle. For others, the issue may very well be getting available food products, in abundance in one part of the State, to another where such commodities may be either in short supply or too expensive for one on limited income to be able to purchase. One need not look too far to become acquainted with other similar examples.

The Commission is acutely aware that hunger is also a symptom, or outcome, of other needs and conditions that lie beyond the charge of this Commission to address, but that nevertheless must also be addressed if food security is to be achieved, such as the need to address the costs of health care and prescription drugs or the need for accessible and affordable quality child care for all working families. The commission has heard repeatedly from the public, for instance, that not only do families need a dependable vehicle in order to hold a steady job, but that action is also needed to improve public transportation services, such as expanding hours of operation into the evening to accommodate those whose work in retail stores and other service establishments ends at 9 or 10 o'clock. Maine needs to make a concerted effort to finding the funds to expand services in targeted areas and time periods.

It is with this acknowledgment in mind that the commission advances this Interim Report and urges consideration of its recommendations --- recommendations which can only be meaningfully put forward as State policy.

Commission Approach



The Millennium Commission has reviewed the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission four years ago and the accomplishments made since their report was issued. We have held public hearings, conducted research, solicited public comments and the input and information of governmental and other agencies and groups. In its deliberations, the following considerations are recognized by the Commission as critical to shaping a true and lasting end to hunger in Maine:

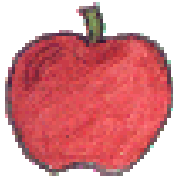
- a. Focus foremost on what steps will lead to an to END hunger (vs. an alleviation of hunger) in Maine;
- b. Seek out an identify actions that address the underlying causes of hunger;
- c. Recognize that there is no single or simple solution;

d. Recognize that ending hunger requires substantive changes in society and in social, economic and food producing/delivery systems, and

e. Focus on long term food security.

At this midpoint in the Commission's work, five goals have been identified so far toward which Maine must move in order to achieve long term and lasting improvement in food security. Several immediate steps have been laid out to start Maine on the course toward their achievement. These alone are not enough. They are building blocks to achieve much larger goals. They are the first steps. The commission will continue to work through the year to finalize its findings and complete the work on the strategy it has begun to prepare.

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II. Maine Hunger Facts

What is Hunger: Though famine, or even severe cases malnutrition, are conditions seen rarely in this country, milder forms of malnutrition, chronic undernutrition and cyclical hunger are common.

Chronic Undernutrition is the consumption of fewer calories and protein than is needed by the body over a long period of time. It often occurs in families where poverty is a chronic problem, where there is inadequate income to provide for the basic needs of the household on an ongoing basis.

Malnutrition is the lack of specific vitamins and minerals needed for vital health. Lack of foods rich in calcium for proper bone development, or of vitamin rich fresh fruits and vegetables are the most common causes of vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Cyclical hunger is caused by monthly, seasonal, or annual variances in production or access to food. It often occurs in families where income is unsteady or fluctuates seasonally or economic or occupational conditions or with the health or presence/absence of wage earners in the home. Cycles of hunger occur when households are forced to choose between food and heat or food and medicine.

Hunger, even in its mild forms, has a profound and lasting effect on growth and development, mental alertness, overall health and well being, productivity, and on one's sense of worth and dignity. One person who submitted testimony to a hearing of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security in 1996 summed up the situation simply but eloquently: "There is no dignity in having to accept a handout. To avoid it people take risks that endanger their health and even their lives."

Although hunger occurs as an individual phenomena, its impact affects and diminishes the lives of everyone in the community. The costs we all pay are substantial. Many are hidden costs, from higher health care costs, to higher taxes to provide emergency services, social programs and services, law and order, extra education programs for children with special needs, to list a few, and there are quality of life costs and, sadly, spiritual costs, all consuming our human and financial resources and energy denying us individually and collectively our full potential.

How much Hunger Exists in Maine?

Hunger in Maine is all too real and all too frequent a condition. It is largely an invisible problem because pride keeps many from seeking help and many more fall between the cracks of services that are intended to provide relief.

One in ten people in Maine are hungry or at risk of being hungry according to the assessment of food security conducted annually by the USDA.

Forty percent of Maine children under 12 years of age are hungry or at risk of hunger. A national study of childhood hunger (CCHIP, the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project) found 20,000 children in Maine under age 12 living in homes where hunger is a constant concern and another 64,000 children under age 12 at risk of hunger.

The CHIPP report revealed that adults are even more likely to experience hunger in low income homes. Adults in four out of five households surveyed indicated that they sacrificed for their children by eating less, skipping meals entirely, or by eating less nutritious food.

In spite of relatively good economic times, poverty has remained a persistent condition for many Maine households. A third of the jobs in Maine do not pay enough to cover the basic needs of a family. Many others are seasonal, less than full time, or offer only partial benefits.

In spite of program cutbacks and efforts to reduce dependence on public aid programs, 100,000 Maine citizens are receiving food stamp benefits this month.

These statistics are only part of the picture. The number of people homeless each night, the hundreds that show up at soup kitchens each day, the thousands that go to a food pantry weekly or monthly, the thousands of meals served to elderly at congregate sites or delivered to the elderly, sick or disabled by meals on wheels programs - all attest to the extent of hunger in Maine and to the depth of suffering that would exist were it not for the generosity and dedication of many. Even more devastating is the plight of those who go without in silence - elderly who refuse help because of pride, or children who go through the school day hungry rather than accept a free lunch and reveal their economic situation to classmates, or breadwinners who feel they have failed their families because they cannot earn enough to provide adequately.



III. Findings and Recommendations

The Commission Findsthat Hunger is due to a Lack of
Economic Security and Well being.

Hunger will remain a problem as long as a large portion of Maine's households do not have enough income to meet their basic needs and to purchase the food necessary for an adequate diet. As long as citizens must choose between food and medicine, or heating their home or fixing the car to get to work in a low wage job, the nutritional well being of Maine residents will be at risk.

Goal 1



Therefore, the State of Maine should work toward achieving a livable wage for all of its workers.

In spite of historically low levels of unemployment throughout most of Maine at this time, those working in lower wage jobs are falling behind. A third of the jobs in Maine do not pay a livable hourly wage, and a disproportionate share of them are held by women who are single wage earners with children. A minimum wage job, assuming it is full time, offers an after tax income of only 70% of the poverty level for a single parent with two children.

First steps

1. Expand the Maine Earned Income Tax Credit Program to make it refundable and increase the amount of benefit a family can receive.

The State of Maine does not currently offer a refundable earned income credit to lower income families with earnings. A non-refundable credit against taxes owed was enacted in the last legislative session. The maximum amount of credit (reduction in taxes) a family could receive is less than \$200. The maximum cost of the current program is \$1.2 million.

This proposal would make the credit refundable (similar to the federal EIC) and would increase the amount of refund a family can receive from 5% (currently) of the federal rate to 15% in 2002 and

25% in 2003. The estimated cost of a refundable credit is \$1 million for every percent increase. At 25% the cost would be \$30 million.

2. Increase the Minimum Wage in Maine.

The minimum wage was last increased from \$4.75 to \$5.15 in 1997. Research has indicated that a wage of nearly \$15 per hour is needed for a single parent with two small children to provide for the basic needs of the family without any public aid.

This proposal would increase the minimum wage in Maine by \$1.00.



Goal 2.

Therefore, Maine must also ensure the services necessary for families to successfully compete in the workplace are available.

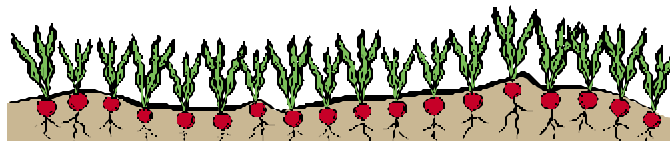
Federal welfare reform that began in 1996 has essentially ended the era of welfare programs that allowed mothers of small children remain at home and provide for their care and replaced it with a new premise that a poor mother's place is at work. Though jobs are plentiful in Maine today, many do not offer adequate wages or benefits to provide the support families need in order succeed in the workplace. Most basic of these are a dependable vehicle or transportation service and safe and affordable care for their children. Opportunities for employment with better benefits and higher wages are often out of the reach of lower income households because they lack a reliable vehicle or a secure child care arrangement. These barriers limit choices and opportunities and keep many in part time positions or in jobs that are closer to their home but pay poorly. As a result, many Maine families have made a transition from welfare poor to working poor. Now more than ever, to prevent poverty among one-parent families, support for childcare, transportation, health care and other needs must be solidly in place.

First Steps

1. Revise and reintroduce LD1668 (Drive Me Wheels-To-Work Program) and capitalize the revolving loan fund with \$750,000

The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security recognizes that for most Maine families, a dependable vehicle is critical to food security because it is the most essential asset to ensuring access to employment and improved income opportunities for Maine's low income individuals. Few people live in places today where they can walk to work, to the grocery store or to school. Reliable transportation is one of the greatest barriers to holding a steady job.

The vehicle loan fund now offered by the DHS and funded with federal TANF dollars has enabled 173 low income households to obtain reliable transportation. There are 150 more on the waiting list. Income from repayment of loans and donations of vehicles sought by Goodwill are not sufficient to meet the demand. This proposal would add an additional \$750,000 to the fund to enable more low income families obtain reliable transportation.



The Commission finds.....that Ending Hunger requires a Comprehensive Food Policy and Structure that addresses fundamental and structural barriers to ensure Maine consumers, especially lower income consumers, have access to affordable food from Maine farms.

The system for delivering food in America has transformed from one where most households produced their own food to a system where less than 3% of the population is engaged in agriculture, from neighborhood stores and local markets to malls and supermarkets where food from all over the world appears fresh daily on the shelves. Though Maine farms produce millions of dollars worth of food each year, most of that which Maine households consume is brought from away while many Maine farms struggle to survive, and even go hungry themselves. Isolation of those in rural poverty, distance and access to farm markets, stands, and even to supermarkets that lie on the outskirts of town, lack of public transportation, and loss of mobility of our seniors and others with disabilities make access to good food difficult for a large portion of those with lower incomes.

Goal 3.



Therefore, Maine must rebuild, indeed reinvent, the foundations that make it possible for Maine consumers, especially lower income consumers, to have access to affordable food from Maine farms.

There are gaps in the food distribution system in Maine. In spite of Maine farms producing \$500 million worth of farm products each year, most of the food consumed in Maine comes from other places. Only a small portion of Maine citizens purchase food regularly at a farm stand, farmer's market, or from a local farm. For Maine farms, the state's 1.2 million population represents a largely untapped

market that could substantially increase agricultural production in Maine and expand the rural economy of the State. Over the years, the networks and systems that linked consumers with those who grow their food have been replaced by massive global distribution systems. The proposed actions set forth here are not solutions by themselves but catalysts to create what will become lasting systems and relationships between consumers and Maine food producers.

First Steps

1. Create a demonstration fund that can be used by agencies to act as a catalyst to develop systems for linking lower income clients and local farmers that will overcome transportation problems and other difficulties lower income individuals have in gaining access to affordable and healthy local food.

Many low income citizens, especially those in urban areas, the elderly, and others find it difficult to get to farmers' markets and farm stands, or to purchase fresh food in bulk direct from area farmers because they lack transportation or have health limitations that prevent access, or find the hours of operation of such markets too distant, limited or in inconvenient locations.

This proposal would provide a small amount of funds (\$100,000) to nonprofit agencies who serve low income clients at nutritional risk to act as a catalyst to develop creative solutions that link their clients and area farmers by addressing barriers such as lack of transportation, access, and affordability. It might include strategies as simple as regularly scheduled transportation to a farmers' market or farmstand, or as complex as establishing arrangements with groups of farms to create bulk purchasing, pre-order arrangements between farms and groups of low income, buying club style arrangements, CSA type arrangements, farmer delivery routes or farmer delivery to a head start or senior center for example. The systems would be implemented, evaluated and adjusted as needed and documented with the results shared and replicated in other areas of the state where appropriate.

The fund should be administered by the Dept. of Agriculture Food and Rural Resources with the assistance of the Maine Dept. of Human Services in the selection of agencies to participate. Demonstration programs designed should involve the input of interested local farms as well as clients.

2. Establish a Maine Agricultural Consumer Promotion Program targeted to low income citizens.

An extensive media promotion campaign is underway by the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources to increase awareness among Maine consumers of the availability of locally grown foods. Incentives are often an effective tool to move people to respond. The coupon program is proposed as an incentive to establish the initial purchase for consumers with limited income in order to reintroduce them to purchasing food directly from Maine growers.

This new program would provide access of as many as 75,000 low income Maine residents to fresh local food from Maine farms by providing coupons redeemable at farmers' markets and approved farm stands, CSAs and other direct farm outlets worth a total of \$100 per person. Coupons could be

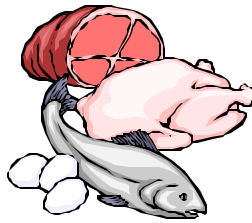
redeemed for fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, fish, eggs, meat and dairy products that are locally produced from approved Maine farms.

Maine has been awarded funds by the USDA for a pilot program that will provide similar benefits to elderly consumers. Several states have supplemented or expanded upon the WIC farmers' market program with state funds to increase the amount of vouchers available for lower income households to purchase fresh produce. This new program would be operated in coordination with existing coupon programs such as the WIC Farmers' Market Coupon Program (that provides \$10 in coupons per person per year to nursing or pregnant women, infants and small children with income under 185% of the poverty guideline for purchase of fresh produce at farmers' markets) and the Senior Farm Share Program, a pilot program that will be operated by the Maine Dept. of Agriculture this year. Estimated cost: \$8 million.

3. Revisit and Update Maine's Food Policy. A Food Policy for Maine was established in 1984. The policy is a comprehensive document that provides a blueprint for sustaining and strengthening Maine's agricultural industry, improving the level of nutrition and health of Maine residents, and for ensuring the many components of Maine's food system from producer to consumer are coordinated and integrated.

However, in spite of its importance, the Policy has not received periodic review and updating, nor is there a mechanism in place for its monitoring and implementation. PL769 enacted by the 119th legislature charged the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to review the policy and to create legislation to codify some provisions of the policy.

The Commission urges the Committee to take quick action to revitalize this important document and in so doing, incorporate a food security component into the policy and establish a mechanism for implementation and periodic measurement of results. To this end, the commission offers support, assistance and input of members and staff.

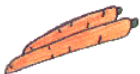


The Commission findsthat Hunger is a result of inadequate systems and resources to respond to new needs created by changing lifestyles, culture and values.

In order to obtain a decent income, families are working harder than ever. In the fast paced nature of life there is lack of time to prepare foods, lack of space and materials needed to effect savings by processing and storing food in season, lack of knowledge of good nutrition, or of how to prepare healthy meals.

In many homes today, the parent(s) leave for work before the child goes to school and no-one is available to make sure the child starts off with a good breakfast or has adequate nutrition throughout the day. Stigma keeps many children from accepting school lunch and many adults from seeking help at pantries or from social service agencies. Illiteracy keeps others from reading recipes or food labels or comparing prices. All of these factors were described at length by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security in their report in 1996. Input from hearings held by the commission and other efforts to gather data confirm them to be chronic problems in our society.

Goal 4.



Therefore, Maine should make school lunch and breakfast universal programs for all Maine children

Less than half of all children in Maine schools participate in the school lunch program. Fewer than a fifth participate in a breakfast program. The reasons are many. Though school lunch is offered in almost all schools today, the breakfast program is far less available. Children and their parents cite unappealing menus, lack of time in the schedule for getting through the cafeteria line, and stigma. Stigma is the major reason for lack of participation in school nutrition programs by low income students. At public hearings across the State, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger & Food Security has

heard countless reports of children at school hungry, the stigma associated with participating in school meals programs, and numerous other actions, rules, and events that serve as disincentives to participation.

Yet the link between learning and nutrition is well established. To reach their full potential, every child needs a nutritious breakfast and a balanced lunch regardless of the family's income or capacity to otherwise provide for the nutritional needs of the child. Yet many skip lunch rather than face embarrassment or because the school schedule does not allow time. Many come to school without breakfast in the morning because parents leave for work before the child goes off to school and there is no time to prepare food or local rules prohibit the child from eating once on the bus.

First Steps:

1. Increase the amount of state funds to school meals program from 3 cents per meal to 3 cents per pupil and provide 1 1/2 cents per pupil for breakfasts. The funds must be used by schools to overcome the obstacles that seem to be so universal within the program and increase participation. Funds could be applied to activities to improve menu offerings, develop systems to reduce stigma for low income participants, or design creative ways to get breakfast into the morning curriculum, etc. This change would increase the school meal subsidy to \$1.6m (from approx. \$400,000 currently).
2. Expand eligibility for the incentive grant program created by the Maine legislature to provide funds to start breakfast programs in schools that do not already have them.

Ease the eligibility requirements for aid from the fund from schools with 30% to 20% of their students eligible for free or reduced price meals.

PL 401 Part KK (L.D. 617 of the 119th Legislature) provided \$240,000 for establishing new school breakfast programs. It provided up to \$3,000 to initiate breakfast programs in schools that have at least 30% of their students eligible for free or reduced-price meals and do not have breakfast). Thirty of the eighty eligible schools started breakfast programs with the aid of that fund. There are many more schools that do not have breakfast programs and are not eligible based on the current criteria. More schools would be assisted to establish breakfast programs by easing the eligibility requirements from schools with 30% of their students eligible for free or reduced price meals to 20% of the students eligible.

4. Instruct the Department of Education to examine how school nutrition programs are being delivered across the state and assist schools to reduce stigma and increase participation in the School Meals Programs.

Schools need more than money. They also need information, ideas, models to evaluate and consider and try. The Department should examine how school nutrition programs are being delivered

across the state and identify systems that are working to ensure anonymity and that result in high participation rates. Specifically, (1) identify rules that may be barriers and identify creative ways of working around problems, such as serving breakfast during home room, at morning recess, etc. as a way to avoid needing extra staff on hand to supervise children arriving for breakfast before the school day starts, (2) identify and discourage local rules that prevent students from getting food, (3) inventory what schools are doing now and identify innovative approaches and share them with the others rather than ask every school to start from a blank page, especially methods of ensuring anonymity for children receiving reduced price and free meals.

Goal 5



Therefore, Maine must make a greater investment in nutrition education.

A variety of social and economic changes have had an impact on the diets of Maine citizens. A very small portion of food consumed by Maine residents today is purchased directly from producers and few structure their diets around food in season or fresh food purchased and processed for later use. Consequently the diets of many are highly dependent on processed foods or pre-prepared foods that typically contain excessive amounts of fats, sugars, and salts and only a fraction of the nutrients found in these foods in their fresh state.

First Steps

1. Provide \$100,000 to expand nutrition education resources to broaden programs that provide information to consumers on the nutritional value of fresh local products, using food in season and related information to encourage the use of Maine farm products. The funds would be used to support partnerships with nutrition educators working with low income families and would expand the education programs already offered to include information on the use of fresh local produce. Cost: \$100,000.



The Commission findsthat for those in need, Maine's system for helping has many gaps and is confusing to consumers, especially those who find themselves in need for the first time.

Too many people are falling through the cracks or suffering unnecessary delays in receiving the help they need because of gaps in eligibility for various services, humiliation suffered by those who seek help due to inadequately trained staff and volunteers, and, especially for those who are in need for the

first time, a lack of any clear entry point or guide to help sort through the programs available and find the ones they need.

The commission heard both from the public and from front line providers that the system for providing aid is complex and cumbersome, often involves a maze of programs, guidelines, and rules that make for great inefficiency and leave people in need falling through the cracks in the system. Providers find they must seek funding from multiple sources, each source having guidelines and categories of need that it can address, and yet see clients routinely that do not fit any of the programs with which they can offer aid



Goal 6

Therefore, Maine must ensure a seamless system of services for those in need.

First Steps

1. The departments and agencies offering services to alleviate hunger and assist citizens in crisis should review their programs and guidelines to ensure that services are available for all in need, and to ensure that where the parameters and requirements of one program leave off, the eligibility for another take up, providing no gaps through which populations in need may fall. At this time, the Commission is offering no specific structure for such a review, but recognizes that it need be conducted periodically as programs change and needs change, and is considering the need for an office of food policy or food security for addressing this and other issues of food security that are ongoing. Any recommendation of this nature will be finalized in the coming year and be presented in the Commission's final report in December.



IV. Conclusions

This interim report presents the initial recommendations of the Commission toward the goal of ensuring that there is food security for all Maine citizens. They are first steps. In the coming year the Commission will finish its work and present a complete report that will we hope will serve as Maine's blueprint for investment to end hunger.

We are merely beginning to plant the seed. Raising the minimum wage by one dollar when a living wage that meets the basic needs of a single parent wage earner with two children is nearly two and a half times the current minimum wage is barely a step, but it is a start. Providing a promotional coupon to a low income person to purchase food from Maine farms will not alone make a lot of difference, but it is a catalyst to re-establish a bond between Maine citizens and those who grow their food that can lead to a lasting producer-consumer relationship yielding opportunities for long term consumer savings and improved nutrition as well as improve the viability of a struggling agricultural economy in Maine.

Though the steps laid out in this report may seem meager, Maine must begin. The commission stresses the urgency and the importance of action on these items. Hunger costs us all and affects the quality of life of all in our society. To achieve lasting food security will require fundamental changes in our social and economic structures and public policy that demand commitment, persistence, and determination.

As Commissioners, we believe that what Maine citizens want, and what Maine citizens choose, is Maine being a hunger-free state.



V. Appendices

1.

State of Maine Notice of Public Hearings to be held by the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security

Purpose: To obtain public comment on matters relating to ending hunger and increasing food security for all Maine residents. The Commission wishes to obtain public comment on preliminary proposals under consideration by the Commission for presentation to the Legislature in an interim report this fall and to gather the suggestions of Maine citizens about further steps needed to end hunger in Maine.

Hearings are scheduled as follows:

<u>Date/Time</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Location</u>
September 27 (Wed.) 7:00-9:00 p.m.	Rockland	St. Bernard's Parish House 150 Broadway
October 11 (Wed.) 7:00-9:00 p.m.	Presque Isle	University of Maine at PI Campus Center, Room 118
October 18 (Wed.) 7:00-9:00 p.m.	Bangor	Bangor Public Library Board Rm., 145 Harlow St.
October 25 (Wed.) 7:00-9:00 p.m.	Lewiston	Multi-Purpose Center 145 Birch St.
November 1 (Wed.) 7:00-9:00 p.m.	Portland	Community Resource Center 252 Oxford Street

All sites are wheelchair-accessible. Persons wishing to attend who have additional needs that require assistance should call 287-6948 (TDD) in advance so that proper accommodations can be arranged.

More information on the Commission activities and preliminary recommendations may be found at www.state.me.us/spo/hunger/. Written Comments are also welcomed.

2.

LAWS OF MAINE

Second Special Session of the 118th

Resolves

CHAPTER 117

S.P. 542 - L.D. 1661

Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security

Sec. 1. Commission established. Resolved: That the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security, referred to in this section as the "commission," is established.

1. Members. The commission consists of 15 members appointed in September 1999 as follows: one Senator from the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters, appointed by the President of the Senate; 3 Representatives from the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; one representative of the Department of Human Services, appointed by the Commissioner of Human Services; and 10 representatives of the general public, including representatives of business, labor, religion, private nonprofit charitable organizations, low-income organizations and agriculture and anti hunger organizations, 4 of whom are appointed by the Governor, 3 by the President of the Senate and 3 by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

2. Organizational meeting. The commission shall hold an organizational meeting, called by the Chair of the Legislative Council, by December 1, 1999 and shall elect from among the members a chair and a vice-chair for the commission.

3. Duties. The commission shall hold hearings on hunger and food security, which, for the purposes of this section, means access through normal channels to nutrition sufficient for daily life and work, and develop a plan for relieving hunger and ensuring food security for people in the State. The commission shall inquire into the experience of hunger in this State and investigate changes in policies and programs that will enable all citizens of this State to attain food security and to move toward self-reliance. This inquiry must include, but is not limited to, consideration of the reform of public welfare and the role of public and private efforts in achieving food security. The commission shall evaluate the progress of recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security.

4. Staff assistance. The Department of Human Services and the Executive Department, State Planning Office shall provide research, clerical and computer assistance to the commission.

5. Reimbursement; mileage. The members of the commission who are Legislators are entitled to receive the legislative per diem as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2 and reimbursement for travel and other necessary expenses for attendance at meetings of the commission upon application to the Executive Director of the Legislative Council for those expenses. Other members of the commission are not entitled to reimbursement for expenses.

6. Report. The commission shall submit a report, together with any necessary implementing legislation, to the First Regular Session of the 120th Legislature by December 15, 2001.

7. Funding. The commission may seek outside sources of funding.

Effective July 9, 1998, unless otherwise indicated.